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SIPDIS

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STATE FOR NEA/ARPI, PRM, AF/E

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SMIG](#) [PREF](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [SO](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: SOMALI MIGRANTS: SMALL PROBLEM, BUT INCREASING IRRITANT

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SUMMARY  
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1. (U) Somali migrants infiltrating Oman from Yemen or by sea, often engaged in unskilled labor but sometimes accused of theft and confrontations with police, have sparked calls for government action from angry local residents and farmers in Southern Oman. Army patrols and police checkpoints have been successful in reducing their numbers (estimated now to be in the low hundreds), but some Omanis are pressing the government to address the roots of the problem with Yemeni and Somali officials. End Summary.

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Somali Migrants Overstay Welcome  
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2. (U) Given the geographic proximity and Oman's colonial legacy in East Africa, ties between Oman and Somalia have a long history. Somalis still occupy a few prominent positions in government and society (including a past deputy governor of Dhofar and the current general manager of Bank Dhofar), but for the most part they have led a quiet existence on the fringe of society in Oman's southern Dhofar region, primarily harvesting frankincense or engaged in artisanal fishing.

3. (U) The Somali presence in Dhofar emerged as a sociopolitical issue in 2003 when their increased presence, stemming largely from Somali refugee camps in neighboring Yemen, began to be noticed on the streets of Salalah, the region's largest city. At that time, a number of Omani families complained about Somali men and women begging door-to-door for food and water, though many local residents charitably provided them food and shelter and saw them as no threat.

4. (U) By spring of 2004, local Dhofaris started reporting incidents of minor theft and violence, including the theft and slaughter of cows and camels at local farms. In an effort to purge Somali hideouts and halt the incoming flow of illegal migrants, the Royal Oman Police (ROP) Criminal Investigations Department established a series of checkpoints in the region to verify identification and close off Somali infiltration. According to local sources, the impact of the security measures was felt immediately, and the Somali presence began to decrease drastically in Salalah. Some migrants, however, were able to elude authorities as they moved into more remote desert areas either up the Omani coast, or inland toward Oman's desert frontier with Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

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Halting The Flow of Illegal Migrants  
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5. (SBU) The Royal Army of Oman Border Security Command is the agency primarily responsible for land border security along the Omani border with Yemen. Other entities, such as the ROP and the Sultan's Special Force, have also aided in apprehending illegal migrants traversing the tri-border area of Oman, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia. An ROP contact in the region informed Poloff that some Somalis, even after being handed over to Yemeni border officials, quickly reappeared in Oman; both Omani and Yemeni nationals were believed to be aiding their transit. He added that a new deportation facility will be built near the current ROP station in Salalah to accommodate detained Somalis before their deportation to Yemen. (Note: According to a Somali embassy representative in Muscat, there are currently about 200 Somalis being detained in Salalah while awaiting issuance of laissez-passer documents in June for repatriation to Somalia. End Note.) In an effort to avoid deportation, some migrants have resisted arrest or claimed to arresting officers to be HIV positive. When taken to a local hospital, these claims have been proven false.

6. (SBU) After a group of local residents recently encountered some illegal Somali migrants on a farm, the topic

of Somali "infiltrators" caused a stir on the popular Internet message board "al-Sablah." Although the commander of the Sultan's Special Force confirms that the number of Somali migrants in Dhofar is negligible, the topic nonetheless generated over 1500 hits and almost 40 responses that, for the most part, criticize the government's handling of the Somali "problem." Respondents urged the government to take action to "stop this dangerous phenomenon because it may lead to increased crime." Some sympathetic respondents felt that Omanis should show compassion to the migrants since they are poor and homeless. Most respondents agreed, however, that the government needs to develop more comprehensive solutions and should cooperate with Somali and Yemeni entities to address the roots of the problem.

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Comment  
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17. (SBU) Despite concern on the part of some Dhofar residents, reports from ROP officials and the Sultan's Special Force suggest that the number of illegal Somali migrants either crossing over from Yemen or coming ashore has decreased considerably as a result of recent sweeps by Omani military and police units. Most estimates place the number of Somalis currently in southern Oman in the low hundreds, at most. The region continues to bear watching, however, as routes used by illegal migrants are always vulnerable to exploitation by more nefarious groups, including those in Yemen and Somalia.  
GRAPPO